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Lawmakers Advance Bills to Modernize Barbering, Cosmetology, and Physical Therapy Boards

The Rules and Judiciary Committee backed two proposals by Sen. Avery Lewis to update licensing boards, expanding district representation for barbers and cosmetologists and defining three-year terms for the Physical Therapy Board to improve continuity.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **October 24, 2025**

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The Committee on Rules and Judiciary has approved two bills that would streamline the operation of two separate boards. Senator Avery Lewis sponsored both pieces of legislation.

The more consequential of the two was Bill 36-0142, which amends title 27 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 17, section 45, by changing the maximum number of members of the Board for the Licensing of Barbering and Cosmetology.

According to Senator Lewis, the bill seeks to “modernize the structure of the board by adjusting the membership provisions to ensure more balanced representation across our districts.” Currently, the law does not contemplate appointments by district, but stipulates that only two board members can be from any one island. Sen. Lewis insisted that “this restriction has often limited the ability to appoint qualified and willing professionals to serve.”

The bill intends to “increase that maximum to three members residing in any district.” For Senator Lewis, the adjustment removes “unnecessary barriers to service” and ensures that the board “continues to reflect the needs and realities of our workforce.”

Invited to testify was Natalie Hodge, commissioner at the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs. She agreed that while the law was “originally designed to ensure balanced representation,” the “administrative and legislative framework of the territory has evolved.” This change has therefore rendered the arrangement “outdated and impractical.” She concurred that modernizing the law would “provide greater appointment flexibility, improve operational continuity and ensure equitable representation.”

The current limitations within the law have “delayed appointments and prevented the board from meeting quorum, hindering the timely processing of licenses and examinations,” Ms. Hodge noted. Redefining membership eligibility will offer “a broader pool of qualified professionals to select from within each district,” she added.

With only “14 current licensed cosmetologists, barbers, and estheticians” on St. John, a larger pool of potential board members is especially critical. They’ll be grouped in with the 177 licensees on St. Thomas, while the other district will be represented by three of the 136 licensed individuals on St. Croix.

The second measure, Bill 36-0141, amends title 3 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 22, section 415 to add a term of service for appointees to the Board of Physical Therapy. According to Sen. Lewis, it simply “clarifies that all board members shall serve a three-year term and may continue to serve until their successor is duly appointed.”

He added that it “ensures the board remains effective in regulating a vital profession while aligning its governance with best practices for professional boards.”

Though not present to provide verbal testimony, the Department of Health signaled its support. So too did DLCA, though not having direct oversight of that board.

Both bills were an easy ask for lawmakers. “I don’t see any sort of collateral damage in the sense of changing any of these items to reflect the purpose of streamlining the process,” remarked Senator Angel Bolques.

“I definitely support the minor changes to these boards,” added Senator Alma Francis Heyliger.

The two bills will be forwarded to the Legislative session scheduled for October 30th for further consideration.